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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002707

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2027

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SUBJECT: THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH SINGAPORE FM  
YEO

Classified By: Classified by: CDA Paul Jones, reasons 1.4 c, d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo des the United States' role in the region as a quiet balancing force, inter only as necessary and offering symbolic support for ASEAN, during a bil meeting with Deputy Secretary Negroponte at the ASEAN Regional Forum (A August 1 meetings in Manila. ASEAN member countries are making economi political gains, although some, such as Vietnam, are progressing more q than others like Indonesia and Burma. Bilateral relations between the Singapore remain strong. Regional trade initiatives and market unifica plans are progressing slowly, but more needs to be done push those goal forward, Yeo added. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The Deputy Secretary commented that much progress had been achi the region, and within ASEAN, over the years since he served as ambassa Manila in 1993-96. He attended an ASEAN meeting in Manila in 1981 and that then they were not talking about a unified market in 2015. Foreig Minister Yeo responded that the ASEAN nations have come together, "not love, but out of fear."

¶3. (C) FM Yeo stated that this multilateral cooperation is a necessity the rise of Indian and Chinese power; ASEAN members decided they would as a coalition. The Deputy Secretary responded that the coalition is a thing and asked about the U.S. role in ASEAN's development. FM Yeo sai the United States should support regional consolidation efforts, but do have to be as active in the region as it had in the past. Rather, the should be ready to intervene when needed. Yeo stressed that the U.S. ro should be supportive in selective situations, and suggested that, when intervenes, it does so "in a nice way." He stressed again that as Chin India increasingly become factors in the region, the U.S. should serve balancing force.

¶4. (C) As country coordinator within ASEAN, Foreign Minister Yeo said Singapore strongly defended the U.S. when A/S Hill was unable to attend dialogue meeting in Washington in June. ASEAN members were also disapp when Summit talks with President Bush were postponed. Yeo acknowledged Secretary's need to be engaged in the Middle East this week. However,

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suggested that the U.S. make symbolic gestures to demonstrate its inter ASEAN. The Deputy Secretary responded that ASEAN is important and that U.S. is sincere in its support and interest. He noted that the postpon events is not an indication that the U.S. is ambivalent about the regio two agreed that the U.S. would continue to show its support and that th make efforts to capitalize on official visits to the region.

¶5. (C) FM Yeo asked what message the United States would like to convey meeting with ASEAN Ministers. The Deputy Secretary responded that he w like to relay a message of reassurance, commitment, presence, and inter called the region an "oasis of tranquility." Yeo agreed, noting that S

Asia must hold together and remain a neutral platform.

#### ASEAN MEMBERS PROGRESSING AT DIFFERENT RATES

¶16. (C) The Deputy Secretary asked about the individual progress of other members. Foreign Minister Yeo noted the progress Vietnam has made. He speculated that in 50 years Vietnam may be the strongest member of ASEAN. Indonesia, on the other hand, is a hard-working nation, but does not have internal capacity to become a similar success. Indonesia is crippled by lack of infrastructure and prevalent corruption. The Deputy Secretary said that the current Indonesian government is the most effective yet. FM Y agreed, but lamented that it is poorly structured with too much power and administrative capabilities. Because so many officials have veto power, corruption has spread throughout the government. The Deputy Secretary said that Indonesia also has a large and growing population. Foreign Minister Y quipped that Indonesia is "growing by one Singapore a year."

¶17. (C) FM Yeo characterized as "good" a recent meeting about human rights concerns between Burma's Foreign Minister Nien Win and EAP DAS Eric Joh Beijing and noted, as an aside, that ASEAN had created a human rights body. He averred that Burma has never been an obstruction to ASEAN. While he was hopeful that Burma would open its market in the near future, he suggested the government has taken some promising steps. It held a constitutional convention and will draft its main constitutional points within the next months. In his view, Burma is "inching forward." The fact remains, however, that the back and side gates of Burma are open to China and India, and Burma remains a strategic imperative. FM Yeo noted that positive things are happening along the Burmese/Thai border, but that China is powering Burma's economy.

#### BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH SINGAPORE REMAIN STRONG

¶18. (C) FM Yeo pointed out the large American business presence in Singapore (more than 10,000 U.S. companies) and said that the American School is the

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the largest in the world. The Deputy Secretary thanked Singapore for being a shepherd in the region over the last year. The Deputy Secretary commented that, if ASEAN adopts a unified currency, Singapore might be the gold standard. Foreign Minister Yeo joked that Singapore would rather keep a low profile.

#### THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

¶19. (C) The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has been in existence for 15 years. The Deputy Secretary suggested that it is time to review the organization's goals so it can move forward. As regional priorities have changed, ARF must become more relevant. Yeo stated that ARF will include Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, but he would like to see a moratorium on new members. He does not want ARF to open membership further to Central Asian nations.

#### U.S./ASEAN MARKET COOPERATION

¶10. (C) The Deputy Secretary reminded Foreign Minister Yeo that the U.S. remains a huge market for consumer products and that, in this regard, the U.S. can help the region move toward a unified market. The two also briefly discussed the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), a year-long agreement intended to strengthen trade and investment ties between the U.S. and ASEAN. The Deputy Secretary asked whether it is active. Yeo responded that it is moving slowly and that ASEAN is approaching it in a practical way. TIFA facilitates cooperation in areas like sanitary and phytosanitary measures and standards.

¶11. (C) The Deputy Secretary concluded the discussion by recounting the history of ASEAN's formation and noting his own long service in the region. In his view, ASEAN represents an interesting and logical evolution. He likened ASEAN to the Treaty of Rome and noted the success of Europe 50 years later. Yeo urged the Deputy Secretary to recount his historical perspective when he meets with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and to stress U.S. interest in regional success.

¶12. (U) August 1, 2007 ; TIME 08:00; Manila, Philippines.

¶13. (U) Meeting Participants:

U.S.

Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte  
Kaye Lee, Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of  
State  
Ted Wittenstein, Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary  
of State  
Jack Andre, Staff, EAP/Regional and Security Policy Affairs  
Mireille Zieseniss, Notetaker

Singapore  
Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo  
Peter Ho, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Jacky Foo, Director/ASEAN Directorate, Ministry of Foreign  
Affairs  
Simon Tensing De Cruz, Director/Special Duties, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs  
Chua Ying Ying, Deputy Director, ASEAN Issues, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs  
Chi Chiew Sum, Special Assistant to the Foreign Minister  
Tracy Tam, Desk Officer, ASEAN Directorate, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs

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